



Reports

America for Sale: Qatar's \$40 Billion Spending Spree Buys Influence and Control of Elite Institutions

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Foreword

America faces a silent invasion. Not of armies or navies, but of capital. Qatar, a tiny Gulf emirate with just 300,000 citizens, has deployed nearly \$40 billion across our nation's institutions since 2012. This is not mere investment. It is calculated influence.

Benjamin Baird's meticulous investigation exposes the full scope of Qatar's American enterprise. The numbers speak plainly: \$33.4 billion into businesses and real estate; \$6.25 billion to universities; \$72 million to lobbyists. Qatar purchases access to our corridors of power while simultaneously funding Hamas terrorists who seek our destruction.

The pattern is clear: Qatar targets critical infrastructure, including our energy grid. It bankrolls academic departments that foment campus unrest, buys Manhattan skyscrapers, and infiltrates Silicon Valley. Its capital flows to Washington insiders who shape Middle East policy.



deserves our partnership.

The pages that follow detail Qatar's sophisticated influence network and offer concrete solutions. Read them carefully. The security of our republic depends on understanding the difference between foreign investment and foreign influence.

Gregg Roman

Executive Director

Middle East Forum

Executive Summary

- A Middle East Forum (MEF) audit of Qatari government spending in the United States going back to 2012 has uncovered approximately \$39.8 billion in payments to [businesses](#), [nonprofits and K-12 schools](#), [universities](#), and [lobbying firms](#). Qatar's investments in U.S. institutions, including critical infrastructure and sensitive technologies, stand contrary to American interests and represent an aggressive soft power influence strategy meant to exploit policymakers and alter public opinion.
- In 2015, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, [announced](#) plans to invest \$45 billion in the U.S. over five years, targeting various sectors including real estate, infrastructure, and businesses. Due to limited transparency, this number is speculative but was likely reached or surpassed in recent years, given the growth trajectory of QIA's total assets.
- An estimated 84 percent of Qatar's U.S. [investments](#) are in real estate, business, private equity firms, and hedge funds. From luxury skyscrapers in Manhattan to cutting-edge tech, medicine, and sports investments, Qatar has spent around \$33.43 billion since 2012 on these commercial undertakings.
- Qatar's investments in critical infrastructure in the U.S. represent a threat to national security and public safety. QatarEnergy and QIA have invested in the U.S. [power grid](#), [liquefied natural gas](#) production, [plastics manufacturing](#), [midstream oil operations](#), and [energy storage](#). As the U.S. moves away from fossil fuels, Qatari ownership of public utilities and energy production inside the U.S. threatens American energy independence. Understanding this threat, 22 states have passed [legislation](#) limiting or prohibiting foreign ownership and control of critical infrastructure.



[officials](#).

- Since 2012, QIA has [invested](#) at least \$6,223,000,000 in Manhattan properties alone, including the iconic [Empire State Building](#) and [Plaza Hotel](#).
- Qatar has [granted](#) \$6.25 billion dollars to U.S. higher education institutions, making it the single largest foreign donor to American higher education, through which it yields significant (and dangerous) influence. As public [scrutiny](#) intensified in the aftermath of October 7 over Qatar's role in promoting anti-American and antisemitic attitudes on college campuses, the emirate's grants to universities only increased, with a record \$980 million in contributions to U.S. schools between January 2023 and October 2024.

Introduction

The Middle East Forum's (MEF) analysis of Qatari government spending has uncovered nearly \$40 billion in payments across multiple American financial sectors spanning [businesses](#), real estate and investment firms, [universities](#), [nonprofit think tanks](#) and public K-12 schools, and [lobbying firms](#). This study closely examines Qatar's high-risk investments in the areas of artificial intelligence, digital technologies, sensitive real estate, and critical infrastructure, while demonstrating how Qatar's agents have penetrated the highest U.S. government offices.

The report also explores existing statutes and pending legislation introduced to counter malign foreign influences in these areas and makes informed policy recommendations to assist lawmakers in mitigating the risks associated with Qatari financing of U.S. institutions.

Masters of Soft Power Strategies

The State of Qatar—a tiny, gas-rich emirate with just 300,000 citizens—projects prestige and influence well beyond its borders. The Persian Gulf powerhouse uses its abundant cash resources as a geopolitical force multiplier, purchasing prestige and influence where other countries rely on military strength, diplomatic alliances, and cultural exports to earn their global standing.



concerning human rights, democracy, and religious extremism. From [noting](#) billionaire Hamas terrorist leaders in Doha's high-rise hotels and luxury villas, to bankrolling jihadist militias in [Syria](#) and [Libya](#), Qatar remains a prolific state sponsor of terror. Furthermore, the emirate's record of labor and immigration [abuses](#), history of [bribery and corruption](#), and support for extreme [Islamist](#) organizations and causes stands in direct contrast to the image that Doha seeks to cultivate on the international stage.



The Al Jazeera network headquarters in Doha, Qatar. (*Shutterstock*)

As a master of soft power stratagems, Qatar burnishes its image by employing mass media manipulation through its Al Jazeera news conglomerate, while buying up professional [sports teams](#) around the world and hosting the 2022 World Cup in a practice called “sportswashing,” all to distract the public from Qatar’s reactionary ideology and authoritarian leadership. Doha’s [financial support](#) for global education initiatives provides access to intellectual elites and the opportunity to influence academic views on a wide range of sensitive political topics.



officials ahead of the world Cup, [planting agents](#) in the Israeli prime minister's office, and [hiring](#) a former CIA officer to discredit Senate Republicans who sought to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group.

The American Marketplace

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the current emir of Qatar, rules over the wealthiest per-capita country in the Middle East as the head of a so-called constitutional monarchy. In practice, the emir maintains absolute authority over Qatar's legal, economic, and social structures, wielding unchecked power through a centralized monarchy that controls government institutions, wealth distribution, and foreign policy decisions.

Al Thani's absolute control extends to the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the nation's sovereign wealth fund, and its many offshoots and subsidiaries. [Created](#) in 2005, QIA has amassed around \$450 billion in capital. QIA subsidiaries include Qatar Holdings, Qatar Sports Investment, Katara Hospitality, Kasada Capital, and Qatari Diar. Other investment arms include QatarEnergy, the Qatar Foundation, and QInvest.

In 2015, QIA opened offices in New York City as part of a [commitment](#) to invest \$45 billion in U.S. markets over the next five years. By 2019, QIA [announced](#) that the fund had invested \$30 billion in American projects and would reach its goal of \$45 billion by 2021. Thanks to confidentiality in private investments and limited regulatory disclosure, the true scale of Qatar's investments in America's economy may never be known.

Nevertheless, this study has [uncovered](#) \$33.4 billion in business deals between QIA and its co-investors in the American marketplace, with billions invested in recent years in critical infrastructure, tech projects, and private equity deals. These investments, which carry risks related to national security, data privacy, and regulatory uncertainty, suggest that Qatar has surpassed its financial goals in the U.S. marketplace.



members and executive branch officials as part of its \$7.2 million [spending](#) spree on political lobbying efforts. These activities began with a [charm offensive](#) in 2017, an exercise to win support from Trump influencers in order to defeat a regional trade embargo against Qatar. When this proved a winning strategy, Qatar increased the flow of cash to K Street as money streamed to [Democrats](#) and [Republicans](#) alike to bolster the emirate's image polishing efforts.



1900 K Street, in the heart of D.C.'s lobby district. (*Wikimedia Commons*)

In the past year, Doha appeared to be rebalancing its influence operations, focusing more on strategic investments in business and academia. With a former real estate mogul in the Oval Office, Qatari



As the single-most active foreign donor of American colleges and universities, Qatar's investments in higher education are well-documented. However, MEF's study reveals an alarming increase in Doha's funding of [academia](#), even as public scrutiny and political opposition to these donations has increased. In the face of [congressional hearings](#), think tank [studies](#), and [media reporting](#) that accused Qatar of fomenting campus antisemitism through academic programming, a defiant Doha's gifts to universities hit record-high levels.

Through Arabic studies and culture fluency programs, Doha is also investing in America's [next generation](#). However, Qatar-funded curricula are not focused solely on language competency skills and cultural practices. The Institute for the Study of Antisemitism and Policy recently [reviewed](#) the Choices Program, a Qatar-backed initiative taught in over 8,000 public schools, and determined that it was "found to systematically distort historical facts to delegitimize Israel."

Doha has also found willing partners in the nonprofit world through generous donations to think tanks and research institutes. More than \$46 million was [allocated](#) for these purposes in gifts to respected organizations like the Brookings Institute and RAND Corporation. Think tanks lend credibility to Qatar's political priorities through conference panels, policy papers, and favorable opinion articles, a oft-used tool in Qatar's soft power arsenal.

This report concludes by offering policy solutions to contain Qatar's patronage network and limit its highest risk investments. Policymakers must consider the national security concerns related to Doha's control of critical infrastructure and sensitive trade secrets and respond by tightening existing [federal oversight](#) of foreign financial transactions. State and local governments have a role to play, too, with dozens of states [enacting laws](#) that limit foreign contracts and real estate deals. Congress should pass pending legislation that addresses foreign funding in [universities](#) and [K-12 schools](#), and lawmakers must increase regulatory oversight of nonprofits and lobbying firms.

As Qatar's Gulf rivals announce [plans](#) to [invest](#) trillions in U.S. projects over the next decade, a modern-day Klondike fever is brewing. Flush with petrodollar wealth, Qatari royals are ready to stake their claim



integrity, and a corrosive pay-to-play political system.

Methodology

This report compiles data collected from open sources, Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) disclosures, ethics filings, and court documents. Traditional research methods were reinforced with generative AI and deep research tools that reviewed thousands of sources to add depth and clarity to the study and to certify results.

This is a non-exhaustive estimate of Qatari funding of U.S. institutions. The audit includes only precise disbursements verifiable from public sources. Payments were excluded where the exact amount of Qatari investments could not be determined. An exception to this rule was made regarding “joint ventures,” or instances where the dollar amount of investments involving Qatar and one or more co-investors was known, but Qatar’s contribution to the total figure was unknown. In these cases, both the report and accompanying data tables reflect the total amount of the joint investment. Excluding these joint ventures would have vastly understated Qatar’s total investments, especially in real estate and private equity.

The true scale of Qatari investments, while unknown, is estimated to be significantly higher than available totals. U.S. privacy laws, particularly regarding private equity and real estate, limit public disclosure and lack transparency, as firms are not required to reveal ownership and financial data. Complex corporate structures involving spinoffs and affiliate companies, as well as indirect investments through minority stakeholders, frequently obscure Qatar’s role in financial transactions.

U.S. Businesses, Real Estate, and Investment Firms



QATARI FUNDING OF U.S. BUSINESS, REAL ESTATE, AND INVESTMENT FIRMS

Significant Persons or Entities	Business	Payment Value	Date	Source
	Trump Properties	\$1,103,244 \$35,000 (Gift: ceremonial dagger)	2016-2020	CREW House of Representatives
	Plaza Hotel	\$600 million	2018	Reuters
Marriott International	St. Regis New York	\$310 million	2019	Bloomberg
Starwood Hotels and Resorts	St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort	\$213 million	2014	The Real Deal
	Manhattan West Development	\$3.8 billion	2015	Business Wire
Blackstone	Los Angeles office portfolio	\$1.34 billion (joint venture)	2016	
	City Center DC	\$650 million	2010	Washington Post

Qatar has made strategic [investments](#) in American businesses totaling at least \$33.4 billion. QIA opened New York City offices in 2015 to help facilitate its U.S. investments, and in 2015 the Gulf emirate [committed to investing](#) \$45 billion in American businesses. Doha likely reached or surpassed this goal in recent years based on QIA's growth trajectory and total assets.

This infusion of capital in American markets aligns with Qatar's [National Vision 2030](#), a development plan to build a sustainable economy and end its reliance on hydrocarbon revenues.

Qatar's U.S. investments serve both its economic and political goals, allowing it to project power and influence on a global stage. Whether through investments in high demand real estate and dominant tech firms, or elite private equity and hedge funds, Doha leverages its financial commitments to enhance its diplomatic standing, gain access to innovative technologies, and cultivate political relationships.



west Development, a series of modern residential and office towers that cost QIA \$5.8 billion. The Qataris went on a spending spree, scooping up palatial residences and luxury hotels, buying the historic [Plaza Hotel](#) in 2018 for \$600 million, and purchasing the [St. Regis New York](#) a year later for \$310 million.

The true scale of Qatar's Manhattan real estate empire is difficult to ascertain. In addition to direct [ownership](#) of properties, QIA holds shares of real estate companies and often does business through spinoffs and affiliates. One [estimate](#) suggests the Qataris have spent tens of billions on properties that amount to ten million square feet of prime real estate in Manhattan. Qatar even has an ownership [stake](#) in the iconic Empire State Building, one of the Gulf monarchy's trophy assets that adds to the royal family's prestige and global standing.



The Qatari flag flies above the entrance to the Plaza Hotel in New York City. (Shutterstock)



the legislation reflects national security concerns and geopolitical considerations related to the trading of property. In particular, the bill bars transactions with designated “countries of concern,” including Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, and North Korea.

Qatar’s real estate footprint extends well beyond the Big Apple. In 2010, Doha plugged \$650 million in Washington, D.C.’s, City Center, [transforming](#) the location from “a sad expanse of parking lots” into a booming residential and commercial district. In 2016, Qatar entered the California real estate market with a \$1.34 billion joint venture [purchase](#) of four class A office buildings in Los Angeles.

In a sign of Qatar’s enduring commitment to the American marketplace, QIA has shifted its investment strategy to focus on hedge funds and longer term private equity firms. This new approach started to take shape in 2017, with a \$575 million [investment](#) in Pershing Square Capital Management, a hedge fund led by activist investor Bill Ackman.

In the past three years, QIA has injected billions of dollars into American investment firms. This includes deals with wealth management titans like [AlTi Global](#) (\$485 million) and [KKR](#) (\$180 million). Qatar has secured investment deals with companies owned by powerful political figures, such as former Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin’s Liberty Strategic Capital, which [received](#) \$500 million in capital from QIA and its partners in 2022, and Jared Kushner’s Affinity Partners, which received \$1.5 billion in [joint ventures](#) between Qatar and its Gulf neighbors.

Qatar’s investments in American sports entertainment companies are part of a sportswashing strategy that Doha [mastered](#) during the 2022 World Cup, as it uses the spectacle and grandeur of professional athletics to distract from its ultra-conservative and authoritarian image. In 2023, Qatar invested \$200 million for a 5 percent stake in Monumental Sports, the company that owns Washington, D.C.’s, Capitals and Wizards franchises. In a tone deaf [response](#) to questions about Qatar’s support for Hamas, a spokesperson for Monumental said the investment deal was necessary for better concessions food and stadium lighting.

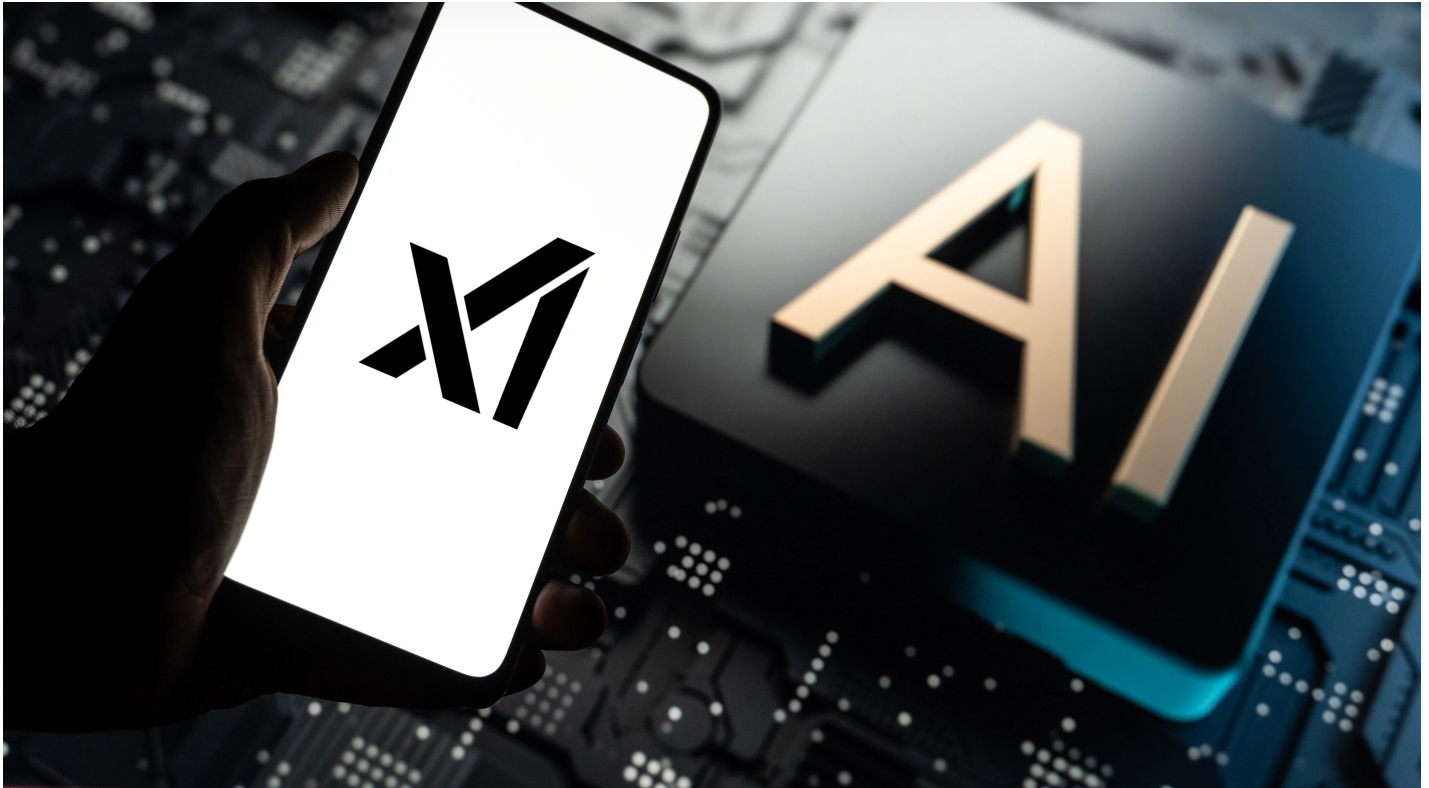


investment firms that engage in business with Qatar. The [letters](#) pointed to reputation risks and civil liabilities connected to Qatar's support for international terrorism. Possibly in response to the campaign, three of the CEOs targeted in the letter-writing effort—Mark Rowan, Bill Ackman, and Jared Kushner—[met](#) with Qatar's prime minister in New York City in December 2023 to pose questions about its support for Hamas.

Qatar's Quantum Leap

By investing in AI and cutting edge technologies, Qatar not only boosts economic growth and enhances national competitiveness among its Gulf rivals, but also unlocks applications in military and defense industries. Through its [Digital Agenda 2030](#), Qatar harbors ambitious plans to become a “global tech hub” with automated government services and a digital ecosystem that promotes entrepreneurship and innovation. Qatar's investments in [Instabase](#), an AI-powered data firm, and [xAI](#), Elon Musk's AI venture, have positioned it as a frontrunner in the global AI race.

Security experts [warn](#) that AI developers are not doing enough to protect their formulas and model weights from foreign adversaries like China. “Whether it's through purchasing and modifying our best open source models, or stealing our best secrets, we really do need to look at this whole spectrum of how do we stay ahead, and I worry that on the security side, we are lagging,” said Susan Rice, President Barack Obama's national security adviser, during a Stanford University panel on AI last year.



Qatar has made substantial investments in Elon Musk's xAI. (*Shutterstock*)

In April, the U.S. Justice Department moved forward with implementing “a critical national security program to protect Americans’ sensitive data from foreign adversaries.” The [final rule](#), a response to a Biden-era executive order, enacts new regulations to prevent countries of concern from using commercial activities to access government-related data and sensitive personal information to commit espionage, counterintelligence activities, and develop AI and military technologies.

Despite not being designated a “country of concern,” Qatar’s extensive business ties with [China](#) and [Iran](#) raise significant data privacy and national security concerns due to its substantial investments in U.S. AI and tech companies. These ties complicate compliance with the Justice Department’s final rule and highlight the potential risks posed by Qatar’s strategic involvement in American technology sectors.

Qatar’s investments in American businesses across all sectors are expected to increase exponentially over the next decade, especially as its chief rival, the U.A.E., has [pledged](#) to deploy \$1.4 trillion in U.S. investments over the same period, and Saudi Arabia [promised](#) to spend \$600 billion in six years. During



clean energy. If U.S. policymakers refuse to consider the threats associated with Qatari investments, Doha will continue injecting capital in high-risk sectors with security concerns.

Critical Infrastructure

Reflecting growing concerns over foreign control of critical infrastructure in the United States, 22 states have [passed bills](#) in the past two years restricting foreign ownership of property and essential systems like energy, transportation, communications, and public health assets. Foreign state control of multinational firms is particularly risky when, [according to](#) international investment experts Alan P. Larson and David M. Marchick, “the foreign company’s decisions become an extension of the government’s policy decisions rather than the company’s commercial interests.”

At the federal level, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) monitors foreign “control” of American businesses and makes recommendations on blocking financial transactions that represent threats to national security and public interests. Lawmakers expanded the [committee’s powers](#) in 2018 amid growing Chinese Communist Party investments in essential American economic sectors.

Significant national security risks, regulatory and oversight challenges, and technology transfer concerns exist regarding foreign ownership of critical infrastructure. The Securities and Exchange Commission has [highlighted](#) difficulties in regulating foreign-owned utilities, thwarting effective oversight and rate-making processes. Structural safeguards have failed to adequately insulate investors and consumers from facing risks associated with foreign companies that are prone to repatriating wealth and subverting American interests, factors that slow job creation and economic development in energy-rich regions of the U.S.

A joint venture with ExxonMobil and QatarEnergy illustrates the potential dangers of sharing advanced industrial knowledge with Qatar. The two companies [invested](#) at least \$8 billion in the Golden Pass Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export plant. Built on the site of a gas-import terminal in Sabine Pass, Texas, the repurposed export plant is expected to [produce](#) 18 million metric tons of LNG annually, significantly boosting America’s position as a leading global exporter of LNG amid growing demands.



In 2019, QatarEnergy invested over \$4 billion in the Golden Triangle Polymers plant in Orange, Texas, which is expected to produce 2.08 million metric tons annually of ethylene, a key component in plastics and other industrial materials. (*Shutterstock*)

Yet, Doha is America's [chief competitor](#) when it comes to the global export of LNG. The U.S. only recently surpassed Qatar as the world's top exporter of natural gas, and as the Gulf state continues to expand production capacity, the rivalry is expected to continue into the 2030s and beyond. The Golden Pass plant offers Qatar intimate knowledge of America's production and supply chain processes—an unacceptable risk since such trade secrets could be used by the Qataris to unseat the U.S. as the dominant LNG supplier.

A [website](#) for the Golden Pass project refers to the facility “as a safety valve for U.S. energy security in the event of market disruptions.” Indeed, America's [export capacity](#) in LNG helped Europe overcome its reliance on piped Russian gas following Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Geopolitical



In 2019, QIA [invested](#) \$550 million in Oryx Midstream Services, a midstream crude operator responsible for transporting nearly 1,000,000 barrels a day of crude oil to U.S. refineries that service the American Gulf coast, ultimately supporting domestic suppliers and the nation's growing export market.

Also in 2019, QatarEnergy [invested](#) over \$4 billion in the Golden Triangle Polymers plant in Orange, Texas, which is expected to [produce](#) 2.08 million metric tons annually of ethylene, a key component in plastics and other industrial materials. The Department of Homeland Security lists petrochemical facilities as part of the nation's [critical infrastructure](#), because they provide the raw materials required to build, maintain, and operate systems that are vital to the U.S. economy.

In late 2020, QIA announced [plans to invest](#) \$125 million in Fluence, a large-scale energy storage solutions provider. Fluence's battery energy storage systems are a key [component](#) in powering modern grid infrastructures. QIA followed up this investment in 2021 by [purchasing](#) \$740 million in common stock of Avangrid, an energy company that [services](#) more than 3 million homes, mostly in the American Northeast. The company generates close to 10.5 gigawatts of energy through wind, solar, hydroelectric, and natural gas facilities.

As U.S. lawmakers seek energy independence from the Middle East, Qatar—one of the Middle East's most important energy suppliers—has gained significant control of America's domestic energy resources. This leaves American customers and investors vulnerable to Middle Eastern geopolitical tensions, resulting in economic dependence and regulatory and oversight challenges.

Qatar's investments in critical U.S. infrastructure may have only started. The emirate announced [plans](#) in 2018 to invest \$10 billion in America's East Coast ports. With Qatar's natural resources and investments in green energy, it will undoubtedly remain a key player in delivering both traditional and renewable energy sources to Western markets.

Lobbying, Public Relations, and Legal Activities



QATARI FUNDING OF U.S. LOBBYING, PR, AND LEGAL FIRMS

Significant Persons or Entities	Business	Payment Value	Date	Source
Corey Leandowski Barry P. Bennett	Avenue Strategies	\$2,100,000	2017	AP
	Blue Diamond Horizons	\$50,000	November 23, 2017	The Hill
	Heritage Advisors	\$5,000+	January 2023-January 2024	Politico
	Ballard Partners	\$690,000+ (plus \$50,000/month for undisclosed period): \$740,000	May 2019-October 2019	Newsweek
Brian Ballard	Ballard Partners	\$2.1 million	April 2018 to March 31, 2019	Florida Politics
John Ashcroft	Ashcroft Law Firm	\$2.5 million	2017	NPR News

Qatar has made significant financial investments in [direct lobbying](#), public relations, and legal services, spending \$71,576,688 since 2015. These lucrative contracts, closed with the influence powerhouses found on Washington's K Street, granted Qatar access to political elites on both sides of the aisle. Former [Congress members](#) and their [staff](#), [ex-administration](#) and [campaign officials](#), and prominent attorneys working for high-powered lobby firms have been employed to whitewash Qatar's record of terror sponsorship, corruption, and labor abuses. Not surprisingly, Doha's [lobbying activities](#) intensified during periods of increased public scrutiny, such as during the anti-Qatar embargo of 2017 and the lead up to the 2022 World Cup.

During Trump's first term, Qatar's primary lobbying interests were focused on [defeating](#) the anti-Qatar blockade organized by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. These countries



offensive, retaining the services of [Stonington Strategies](#), a new firm run by former Trump campaign staffer Nick Muzin and restaurateur Joey Allaham, who devised a plan to win support from 250 Trump influencers. At the same time, Qatar [hired](#) former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft's law firm "to evaluate, verify and as necessary, strengthen the client's anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing" laws, according to FARA filings.

Washington lobbyists also helped Qatar secure business relationships with some of the country's most powerful executives. These investments in real estate and private equity, profiled separately in this report, could come to serve Doha well during Trump's second administration, given the number of [billionaires](#) and business elites currently serving in the White House or influencing the president's decisions.

During the Biden administration, Qatar sought to "convince Washington to task it with regional missions allowing Doha to play the role of mediator and so project wider influence in the Middle East," according to an [analysis](#) in the *Arab Weekly*. Qatar hoped to insert itself into U.S.-Iran nuclear talks, while representing Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist factions throughout the region.

Doha found itself on the defense during much of Biden's term. Following Hamas's October 7 terrorist attacks in Israel, which Qatar was accused of facilitating through financing Hamas and hosting its leadership, Doha positioned itself as the primary mediator between Israel and Hamas—a role that earned it the gratitude of some Western policymakers who view its mediation as essential to a peaceful solution in Gaza. However, [critics warned](#) that Qatar is not a neutral arbiter, but a representative of Hamas's interests.

Starting in 2018, Qatar retained the [services](#) of Ballard Partners, a firm headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida, and led by Brian Ballard, who *Newsweek* [referred](#) to as "the most powerful lobbyist in Trump's Washington." Ballard Partners earned \$115,000 a month in a contract with Qatar that required "providing advice, counsel, and other assistance with respect to efforts to combat human trafficking." At the time, Qatar was accused of gross human rights abuses regarding its [migrant workers](#).



(D), signed [contracts](#) with Qatar totaling \$1,725,000 over the past two years. Moran [subcontracted](#) part of this work to a law firm that retained former Congressmen Tom Davis (R-VA) and Tom Reynolds (R-NY), who focused on targeting Republican members of the U.S. House and Senate.



Former Representative Jim Moran (D-VA) (*U.S. House of Representatives*)



the pair were in Qatar to discuss the country's domestic and foreign policy positions. In March 2023, [reporters](#) pointed to Marshall's "bizarre" pro-Qatar speech during a congressional hearing, where the senator admonished a witness for questioning Qatar's investments in U.S. higher education. Marshall was once among Qatar's fiercest critics, speaking at a 2019 Middle East Forum [conference](#) that characterized the Gulf state as a "global menace."

Moran has [represented](#) Qatar since 2017, first as a legislative adviser with McDermott Will & Emery before moving in 2019 to Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough, which already represented Doha, to "coordinate better all of Qatar's activities." Following the disastrous U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Nelson Mullins distributed a [document](#) highlighting praise for Qatar's role in "facilitating the airlift of 60,000 men, women, and children" from Afghanistan. Then-Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez (D-NJ), who was later convicted for accepting gold bars as a payment in a [bribery scheme](#) involving Qatar, [called](#) the Gulf country "moral exemplars" for temporarily hosting Afghans bound for the U.S. "They saved our butts," said former Rep. Scott Taylor (R-VA) in a statement distributed by Nelson Mullins.

In addition to former elected officials, Doha also capitalizes on the political connections of former congressional staff like Andrew King of Neale Creek. A former deputy chief of staff to Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), King [helped](#) the Qataris with political outreach and developing "investment and business opportunities." Graham emerged as a major [pro-Qatar booster](#) in Congress, and QIA planned to invest billions in a military aircraft company based in South Carolina called [Barzan Aeronautical](#), which is dedicated to the "development and production of surveillance aircraft." Furthermore, Qatar has purchased billions of dollars' worth of Boeing commuter and military aircraft, and the emirate has signed a "declaration of understanding to encourage economic development" with Charleston, South Carolina, home to a Boeing manufacturing plant.

Imaad Zuberi, an elite lobbyist for QIA who was [paid](#) nearly \$10 million for "secretly" lobbying the White House and Congress on behalf of Qatar, donated to Graham and South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster's campaigns and was later sentenced to 12 years in prison for failing to register as a foreign



Granam's 2014 Senate campaign.

In 2024, Qatar spent at least \$3,311,891 on [lobbying expenses](#), a notable drop from an average \$8.4 million expended annually between 2016 and 2023. This decline in spending occurred amid growing public scrutiny of Qatar's ties to Hamas in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks in Israel, and [concerns](#) over Doha's funding of U.S. higher education, and its alleged [role](#) in fomenting antisemitic violence on college campuses.

Perhaps Qatar was hedging its bets during a crucial election year. Alternatively, the Gulf state may have adjusted its strategy, finding it more productive to invest in businesses and real estate connected to political heavyweights. Whatever the case, Qatar's investments in traditional lobbying and PR services are likely to continue, supplementing a larger soft power influence strategy that has paid massive dividends to the gas-rich monarchy.

Bankrolling Access to Power

Qatar's attempts to court favor with the Trump administration began in 2017, when public affairs specialists Nick Muzin and Joey Allaham orchestrated an unorthodox [lobbying campaign](#) that sought to win support from Trump influencers. This public relations blitz occurred amid an anti-Qatar blockade involving Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, which took exception to Doha's support for Iran and patronage of international terrorist groups. Armed with a list of 250 Trump associates, Muzin and Allaham spearheaded a "charm offensive" that offered key Trump allies luxury trips to Doha and consulting deals. Targets included lawyer Alan Dershowitz and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who now serves as U.S. ambassador to Israel.

With the end of the embargo, public interest in Qatar's lobbying practices faded. Nevertheless, after Trump left office in 2021, Qatar's influence activities intensified and grew more sophisticated. The emirate's Charm Offensive 2.0 targeted a smaller yet more authoritative cadre of Trump insiders—individuals who would attempt to influence the president in his second administration. If Muzin and Allaham were part of a fishing expedition in 2017, Qatar graduated to hunting whales after the



Jared Kushner's Miami-based investment firm Affinity Partners has [received](#) at least \$1.5 billion in funding between Qatar and U.A.E. The Qataris were initial investors when the fund first opened in 2020—months after Trump left office—and they re-upped their investment in February 2024.

Kushner promised there would be no political favors in exchange for the investments: “And I made very clear to them [Qatari investors] that in the event that Trump was elected that they should not expect anything from me for that.”

During the final month of Trump's first term, Kushner [reportedly](#) crisscrossed the Middle East with then-Treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin to raise money for an “Abraham Fund” that was supposed to bring billions of dollars in investments to the region. The development fund never materialized, but along with Kushner, Mnuchin quickly established a private investment fund, Liberty Strategic Capital, and subsequently collected \$500 million from Qatar, Kuwait, and the U.A.E.





Trump's former advisers and associates also hauled in Qatari cash via lucrative lobbying deals. Much of this funding occurred during Qatar's 2017 charm offensive and included [allegations](#) of unregistered lobbying on behalf of Qatar. For instance, Barry Bennett, an adviser on the 2016 Trump campaign, reached a deferred prosecution agreement for failing to register under FARA regarding work described by the Associated Press as "denigrating one of Qatar's unnamed rivals."

Bennett founded the lobbying firm Avenue Strategies with Corey Lewandowski, Trump's former campaign manager, and together the pair [profited](#) from \$2.1 million in lawful lobbying expenses on behalf of their clients in Doha. Lewandowski's former employee at Americans for Prosperity, Stuart Jolly, who also worked on the 2016 Trump campaign, earned money from Qatar, as well – \$31,000 a month for three months for [subcontracting work](#) at Gary Silversmith.

Jason Klitenic, the top lawyer for the Trump administration's intelligence community until 2020, worked at Holland and Knight when Qatar [paid](#) the firm nearly \$1.5 million. Even Michael Cohen, Trump's turncoat attorney and former legal fixer, [earned](#) a quick \$100,000 from Qatar for brokering a real estate deal in Florida.

So far, elected leaders appear uninterested in closing the "revolving door" of retired politicians and Washington bureaucrats who secure high-paying lobbying and political consultancy jobs. In the House, a [2023 bill](#) that placed a lifetime ban on lobbying from former members of Congress received little support and never made it to the House floor. Senate bills in [2018](#) and [2020](#) that placed limits on lobbying and required greater oversight and transparency around lobbying among former elected officials failed to advance.

Several [states](#) have enacted statutory provisions that limit political lobbying for a specific period of time among former local and state politicians. Unless similar provisions are adopted at the federal level, Qatar and other foreign adversaries can rely on a fresh stable of former executive and legislative officials to exploit their political connections in support of foreign interests.

Think Tanks, Nonprofits, and K-12 Schools



QATARI FUNDING OF U.S. THINK TANKS, NONPROFITS, AND K-12 SCHOOLS

Significant Persons or Entities	Organization	Payment Value	Date	Source
John R. Allen	Brookings Institute	\$29.8 million	2011-2021	IPT News 4 Buffalo
	Stimson Center	\$2,315,000		TTFT
	Middle East Institute	\$380,000		TTFT
	RAND	\$300,000		TTFT
	Center for Strategic and International Studies	\$100,000		TTFT
	Wilson Center	\$100,000		TTFT
Zionist Organization of America	Morton Klein	\$100,000	2017-2018	Tablet
	World Poultry	\$13 million	2023-2028	W/PF

As part of an effort to influence U.S. foreign policy and public education, Qatar has [invested](#) more than \$48 million in recent years in think tanks, nonprofits, and K-12 schools. These investments align with Doha's goals to encourage policies and narratives that support its Islamist agenda, whitewash its corruption, and distract from its sponsorship of terrorists and extremists.

Qatar's investments in think tanks and research institutions represent a form of [backdoor lobbying](#), using the reputation and scholarly status of Washington's policy institutions to advance its political priorities. Lawmakers who depend on think tank research to make informed policy decisions are often unaware of the role of foreign governments in funding some of the Beltway's most prominent research centers.



administration.

The think tank established its [Brookings Doha Center](#) in 2008 in Qatar, a regional hub for scholarship on the Middle East and North Africa. Among its signature programs was a [U.S.-Islamic World Forum](#) that aimed at improving relations with the Islamic world. The Doha Center was [shuttered](#) in 2021 amid increasing scrutiny over Brookings' relationship with Qatar.

While working at Brookings in 2017, former Gen. John Allen was allegedly lobbying the Trump administration on behalf of Qatar while failing to report his activities to the Justice Department. Allen [resigned](#) as Brookings president in 2022, when a federal investigation into his unregistered lobbying became public.

The Investigative Project on Terrorism conducted a [study](#) that reviewed a dozen conferences co-hosted by Brookings and Qatar, along with 125 speeches from those events, and 27 policy papers published at Brookings facilities. The results showed that the think tank routinely platformed Islamist speakers who justified attacks against American troops and Israeli civilians and who supported blasphemy laws that proscribed criticism of Islam. Importantly, the review showed that Brookings refused to criticize the government of Qatar and its policies.



Qatar's favorite Washington think tank is undoubtedly the Brookings Institute, which has collected close to \$30 million in Qatari cash since 2011. (*Shutterstock*)

Brookings may be the greatest nonprofit recipient of Qatari funds, but it is not the only think tank that Doha finances. The Stimson Center has [collected](#) over \$2.3 million in donations from Qatar. In 2021, Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI) [called](#) for a Justice Department investigation into the Stimson Center, alleging that a senior advisor for the think tank carried out unregistered lobbying on behalf of Qatar to undermine and defeat a cybersecurity bill. Introduced by Bergman, the Homeland and Cyber Threat Act would have allowed U.S. citizens to collect damages against foreign governments that carry out cyber-attacks against the U.S.

Bergman, who called Qatar "one of the most notorious sponsors of cyber-attacks against U.S. entities," alleged that Stimson Center senior advisor Debra Decker met with lobbyists who represented Qatar's embassy and held meetings with State Department officials and congressional offices to "undermine



Doha's influence in the think tank and nonprofit world extended to other prominent institutions. America's original think tank, the RAND Corporation, which was established by the U.S. military and now accepts both public funding and private donations, [received](#) \$300,000 in Qatari contributions. The establishment Middle East Institute [received](#) nearly \$400,000 from the Gulf emirate. It produced content that is described as "generally favorable to Qatari interests." Even Mort Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America and a longtime critic of Qatar, accepted a pair of \$50,000 [donations](#) to his nonprofit from a registered agent of Qatar. The contributions came ahead of Klein's 2017 trip to Doha and after a prominent Qatari investor attended ZOA's annual fundraising dinner.

When countries like Qatar, which has used [bribery](#) and [espionage](#) to manipulate policymakers, fund American think tanks, it distorts the credibility of the entire industry. Think tanks are valued for their scholarly objectivity and independent research. The infusion of Qatari cash into this arena casts a veil of uncertainty around nongovernmental institutions that are in the business of influencing policy.

Lawmakers have been slow to react to foreign interference in the policy-making arena. In April 2024, Rep. Jared Golden (D-ME) introduced a [bill](#) called the "Fighting Foreign Influence Act" that required tax-exempt organizations, including think tanks, to report high-dollar donations from foreign governments and political parties on their annual tax returns. Golden's bill also sought to impose a lifetime ban on foreign lobbying from former executive branch and senior military officials. The bill failed to advance beyond committee.

Public Schools

Qatar has invested significant [resources](#) in recent years in an effort to influence K-12 education in the U.S., primarily through financial contributions, the support of programs aimed at advancing Arabic language education, and teachers' training programs on so-called "cultural understanding."

The Qatar Foundation International (QFI), the key tool of Qatar's efforts, has [allocated](#) millions of dollars to schools, districts, institutions, and programs across the U.S. This financial influence raises questions about the role of foreign government funding in shaping educational curricula for American



partnerships.

Schools in [Texas and New York](#) were part of Qatar's Arab Culture Arts program, and some classrooms using the curriculum reportedly used materials that replace Israel with Palestine. In Texas, Dallas Independent School District and Manara Academy in Irving received QFI-funded resources and adopted [mapping resources](#) for lessons that, like those in NYC, misrepresented the Middle East, labelling Israel as "Palestine."



The Qatar Foundation headquarters in Doha. *(Shutterstock)*

In April, Brown University [ended](#) its 35-year partnership with Qatar by closing its "Choices" program, a high school curriculum affecting one million students at an estimated 8,000 schools nationwide. Although the university claimed the closure was due to financial challenges, the decision to shutter the



Congress is beginning to recognize how foreign adversaries are using American classrooms to advance an anti-American agenda. In February, Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL) introduced the [TRACE Act](#), a bill that requires public schools across the country to inform parents when foreign nations fund classroom curricula or teachers' salaries. Meanwhile, several [states](#) have introduced or passed legislation targeting foreign influence in public K-12 schools, although the focus is aimed predominantly at Chinese Communist Party programs like the Confucius Institutes. For now, QFI's destructive influence over American classrooms has failed to rally significant opposition from U.S. policymakers.

Qatari Influence in Higher Education

As the [largest](#) foreign donor to American higher education institutions, Qatar has given a total of \$6,250,240,136 to U.S. universities and colleges. However, this total is likely much higher; investigations during the first Trump term [uncovered](#) \$6.5 billion in unreported foreign contributions to universities between 2019 and 2021, including from Qatar. Between January 2023 and October 2024, Qatar gave nearly \$1 billion to foreign schools—a massive increase in spending that occurred even as public outrage soared over its role in fostering antisemitic and anti-American [attitudes](#) on college campuses.

These funds support a wide range of activities, including research programs, scholarships, and the establishment of branch campuses in Qatar's Education City, which hosts satellite campuses of several leading U.S. institutions. Qatar [leverages](#) this financial power to enhance its global prestige and shape academic discourse to promote narratives aligned with its political interests, including [support](#) for Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated causes and anti-Israel agendas.

Qatar's approach to funding foreign universities is strategically [crafted](#) through its use of the Qatar Foundation, a [self-described](#) nonprofit entity based in Doha. While the foundation is structured as a private organization, it was founded by the emir of Qatar and operates under his patronage. The foundation's [structure](#) allows universities to deny receiving money from the state of Qatar, instead attributing the donations to private donors, a sleight of hand that allows schools to manipulate disclosure obligations under Section 117 of the Higher Education Act, which requires U.S. universities to report foreign government gifts or contracts.



For the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy Studies (ISGAP) research estimates that Yale has [received](#) nearly \$16 million from Qatari sources since 2012, despite officially disclosing only a small fraction of that amount. Columbia University's Qatari funding was [disbursed](#) across several categories: approximately \$500,000 from joint projects with Qatar Foundation International; around \$1.5 million from six National Priorities Research Program grants; about \$1.75 million from energy research collaborations; and an estimated \$3.42 million from Qatari-funded student scholarships. None of these funds have been reported to the U.S. Department of Education as legally required.

This lack of disclosure prompted federal investigations into these universities for failing to disclose foreign funding properly. The undisclosed support includes research partnerships, scholarships, and participation in international education initiatives funded by Qatari state proxies. Meanwhile, universities have experienced increased antisemitic incidents, particularly Yale and Columbia, [driven](#) in part by student groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), which creates an increasingly hostile environments for Jewish students. These developments highlight the urgent need for greater oversight and transparency to protect academic integrity and campus safety from foreign political influence.



Qatar Foundation official Haya Al-Nassr with the late Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

Qatari funds have not only played a central role in establishing new academic departments and research programs, but even entire campus locations, most notably Education City in Doha. This major project, funded by the Qatar Foundation, hosts branch campuses of several leading U.S. universities, including Georgetown, Carnegie Mellon, and Cornell. Making substantial investments, often [channeled](#) via state-owned NGOs, Qatar supports a wide range of initiatives from research to scholarships, embedding itself within the academic landscape both in Qatar and abroad.

In recent years, especially following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel, scrutiny of foreign funding in U.S. universities intensified, with Qatar facing significant backlash. As college campuses [experienced](#) rising incidents of violent antisemitism, student encampments, and ideological support for terrorism, researchers pointed to Qatar's influence over higher education. A study from the Network Contagion Research Institute demonstrated that schools that accepted donations from Middle Eastern sources [experienced](#) 300 percent higher incidents of antisemitism compared to colleges that did not.



nearly double the amount invested over the previous two years.

However, there are some signs of shifting relations and growing discontent regarding Qatar's expanding influence in higher education. Texas A&M's decision to withdraw from its Qatar campus by 2028 marks a significant turning point. The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy's investigations [revealed](#) that the Qatar Foundation, which funds Texas A&M in Qatar, holds ownership over intellectual property from more than 500 research projects, including sensitive work with potential dual-use applications that could contribute to military technologies, such as nuclear and high-energy research. Qatar's access to sensitive information not only raises serious concerns about academic freedom, but also U.S. national security. The Middle East Forum has been instrumental in exposing these risks, [reporting](#) on how Qatar's control over research and data undermines U.S. academic standards. Texas A&M's exit challenges Qatar's Education City initiative and signals increasing scrutiny and re-evaluation of American universities' partnerships in the region.

Another notable example of concerns over Qatar's political influence is the partnership between Northwestern University's journalism school and Al Jazeera, the Qatar-owned media network. Established in 2013, this collaboration involved joint research, internships, and faculty exchanges, raising alarms about media control and ideological influence, given Al Jazeera's ties to the Qatari regime and its pro-Islamist coverage of Middle East conflicts. Growing scrutiny, particularly after Congressional questioning of Northwestern's ties to Al Jazeera, led to the university ending this partnership in 2024. This [severance](#) reflects rising unease about foreign political influence in U.S. higher education and media and underscores the challenges universities face in balancing international collaboration with safeguarding academic independence.

Many U.S. universities have avoided fully reporting the extent of Qatari financial support by channeling funds through the Qatar Foundation and other state-linked proxies, rather than receiving them directly from the Qatari government. This practice exploits [loopholes](#) in Section 117 of the Higher Education Act, which requires universities to disclose foreign gifts and contracts over \$250,000, but often fails to capture donations routed through affiliated NGOs or foundations. Additionally, Section 117 reporting



portal that simplified public access to foreign funding information.

On April 23, the White House announced an [executive order](#) that empowers the secretary of Education to take immediate steps to improve transparency and accountability surrounding Section 117 reporting. The president's order is intended to end the dismantling of reporting requirements and mandate more specific disclosure of foreign funding metrics.

In response to concerns about foreign funding, legislative efforts like the Defending Education Transparency and Ending Rogue Regimes Engaging in Nefarious Transactions (DETERRENT) Act have gained momentum. Passed by the House in March 2025, the [DETERRENT Act](#) aims to tighten reporting requirements for foreign gifts and contracts, lowering the disclosure threshold from \$250,000 to \$50,000 and imposing a zero threshold for "countries of concern." It also mandates annual public reporting of investments linked to these countries and requires institutions to obtain government approval before entering into contracts with them. Noncompliance could result in fines or loss of federal student aid eligibility.

However, Qatar was left off the DETERRENT act as a country of concern. This [exclusion](#) may complicate efforts to address foreign interference and leave American academia vulnerable to the influence of an Islamist regime known for supporting extremist groups and suppressing democratic values. Qatar's defense—that its investments promote academic collaboration at the global level—is contradicted by evidence of its alignment with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas and by the pattern of campus hostility associated with its funding.

Policy Considerations

To protect American interests, the U.S. must respond to Qatar's pernicious attempts to manipulate public opinion, influence politicians and business leaders, and undermine U.S. alliances through its sophisticated investment strategy. This requires a complete policy overhaul and governance reset. It is time for Washington to view Qatar through the same lens that it sees foreign adversaries like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.



The White House should rescind Qatar's status as a Major Non-NATO Ally. As long as Qatar receives this privileged status, it is difficult to impose financial oversight protections and other reforms that effectively treat Doha as a foreign adversary. (*Shutterstock*)

The White House should start by rescinding Qatar's status as a [Major Non-NATO Ally](#). As long as Qatar receives this privileged status, it is difficult to impose financial oversight protections and other reforms that effectively treat Doha as a foreign adversary.

Congress and the executive branch can take immediate steps to restrict Qatari investments in multiple sectors. By amending existing federal statutes that list "countries of concern," lawmakers will ensure that Qatar is covered by any current or future regulations dealing with financial transactions and foreign states.

For example, [42 U.S. Code § 19221](#) deals with protecting American interests and competitiveness in the areas of science, technology, and research. Listing Qatar as a "country of concern" would require the government to develop safeguards to mitigate the risks of technology transfers and commercial



In addition, the following policy recommendations are strongly encouraged:

Business

- In the financial sector, policymakers must be judicious in how they respond to Qatari investments, striking a balance between interventionist regulatory oversight and an economic framework dangerously exposed to unchecked foreign investment.
- The Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S. (CFIUS) should be directed to conduct risk assessments related to major Qatari investments. Any financial transactions related to critical infrastructure and technology transfers should trigger an automatic 45-day CFIUS review that examines the national security implications related to the transaction. The committee has the authority to recommend that the president prohibit business transactions involving a foreign entity.
- Qatar should be listed as a “country of concern” under the provision of [Executive Order 14117](#) – Preventing Access to Americans’ Bulk Sensitive Personal Data and United States Government-Related Data by Countries of Concern. Doing so would restrict high-risk data transactions with Qatar and enhance security measures around financial deals involving sensitive technologies.
- The New York State Assembly and Senate should pass [legislation](#) that blocks “countries of particular concern” from real property acquisitions. If the State Department lists Qatar, it would be blocked from the Manhattan real estate market. Other states and municipalities should adopt similar measures.
- Congress should pass a bill that would prohibit Congress members, presidents, vice presidents, and Cabinet secretaries—as well as their close family members—from earning a salary or holding investments in foreign businesses for as long as the official is in office (see the [Stop Foreign Payoffs Act of 2023](#)).

Higher Education

- The [DETERRENT Act](#), which passed the House in March, changes the reporting requirement for universities accepting foreign gifts, lowering the disclosure threshold from \$250,000 for every foreign country, or any amount for countries of concern. The bill also bans contracts with these foreign adversaries and includes punitive measures.



purposes behind each foreign gift.

- Congress should add the Qatar Foundation to the Fiscal Year 2026 list of foreign institutions engaging in problematic activity as described in Section 1286, as amended, of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019.

K-12 Schools

- The House should advance and pass [H.R. 1049](#), the Transparency in Reporting of Adversarial Contributions to Education (TRACE) Act, which requires that schools disclose any foreign funding of school materials or programs to parents upon request.
- States that impose restrictions on foreign influence in K-12 schools should consider adding Qatar as a country of concern. State governments should also instruct local school boards to review any Qatar-funded classroom materials for politicized, ahistorical, or biased information and take appropriate action.

Lobbying

- Congress should introduce and pass legislation that imposes lengthy bans for lobbying on behalf of foreign entities for former members of Congress and executive branch officials.
- Amend the [Ethics in Government Act of 1978](#) to extend the timeframe that members of Congress and executive branch officials must report foreign lobbying expenses on financial disclosures. The law should also be amended to require narrower income ranges from lobbying payments and to more accurately reflect the purpose behind lobbying activities.

Nonprofits

- Congress should pass legislation that requires 501(c) nonprofit institutions to report donations of any amount from foreign entities on their IRS Form 990 annual tax returns. This information should be listed in a publicly accessible database.





Criminality

US politics



Benjamin Baird

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